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ABSTRACT

Understanding communication (of which individual events is a part) requires a triangle among theory-practice-criticism, and any missing component dramatically hinders understanding and ability. Students compete in, and judges judge, forensics to better enhance communication understanding and abilities. The process of oral interpretation requires a performer to make a choice concerning how he/she wishes to approach the literature. The three dominant perspectives of oral interpretation are the Objectivist/Author's Intent, Subjectivist, and Constructionist/Poststructural. Public address events should adhere to traditional organizational and evidentiary requirements detailed in contemporary public speaking textbooks. Impromptu speaking, extemporaneous speaking, after-dinner speaking, informative speaking, persuasive speaking, and rhetorical criticism/communication analysis should strive to meet certain conditions. (RS)

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Individual Events Judging Philosophy

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INDIVIDUAL EVENTS JUDGING PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

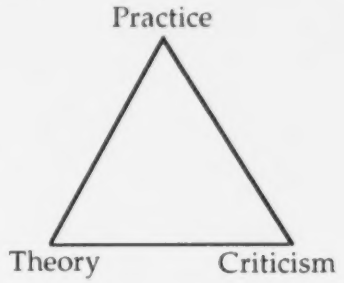
The realm of individual events competition is mediated by individuals serving as judges during competitive tournaments. I believe a judge serves a distinct purpose in individual events. I open my philosophy, therefore, with a broad framing statement of the fundamental expectations of an individual events judge.

Understanding communication (of which individual events is--hopefully--a part) requires a triangle between theory-practice-criticism (Thonssen, Baird, & Braden, 1948/1981). any missing component dramatically hinders/limits understanding and ability. We may grasp by using the triangle pattern how any one component influences and substantiates the other two, i.e.:

PRACTICE influences theory and criticism;

CRITICISM influences practice and theory;

THEORY influence criticism and practice.

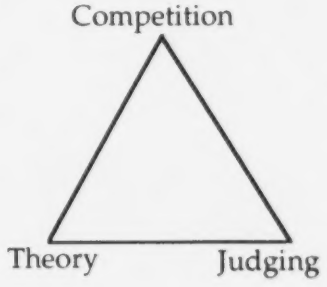


Now, let's apply the concept to forensics:

COMPETITION is basis for practice;

JUDGING provides criticism;

THEORY influence criticism and practice.



If we remove theory from the picture, judges no longer have the ability to clearly explicate "why" comments on ballots may be justified. Comments on ballots fall into the "black hole" of personal opinion lacking pedagogical/theoretical support and serve no useful function to students–now or in the future. A student competitor needs to know "what" to do *and* "why" to do it.

Students compete in--and I judge--forensics to better enhance communication understanding and abilities. The only way students can really become better worthwhile speakers is to know not only what to do--but "why." I believe, therefore, theory is a driving force behind forensics--whether rhetorical, performance, interpersonal, intercultural . . . . Students need to analyze and theorize "why" a performance worked, if they ever hope to repeat the process.

Finally, a common dilemma some forensics program face is lack of support by communication departments on their own campuses. I believe forensics is a co-curricular activity and should expand on what students learn in communication classrooms. Forensics becomes, thus, intrinsic to communication departments when a co-curricular educational philosophy is the foundation of the program.

ORAL INTERPRETATION EVENTS

I believe oral interpretation is the process of students performing literature in order to provide a better understanding of the human condition for themselves and their audience. We live in a society facing a plethora of dilemmas from racism and cultural elitism to fragmenting national and social identities to agism, racism, and sexism, to homophobia and . . . . The list of issues facing humans is limited only by the creativity and imagination we use to construct and understand the world

around us. Oral interpretation provides performers and audience members an opportunity to explore and come to terms with the essence of being human.

I believe the process of oral interpretation requires a performer to make a choice concerning how they wish to approach the literature. I shall outline what I consider the three dominant perspectives: Objectivist/Author's Intent, Subjectivist, and Constructionist/Poststructural.[1] I have a personal preference, yet, I attempt when judging to place no hierarchy of value pertaining to the choices students may make–as long as students understand and are willing to live with the implications of their choices.

Objectivist/Author's Intent

The objectivist position is one of the more popular perspectives posited by oral interpretation performers (Cronn-Mills & Cook, 1995). An objectivist/author's intent perspective assumes the writer embedded an invariable meaning in the text. The meaning is, therefore contained in and may be extracted from the text. The objectivist/author intent perspective is a linear phenomenon:

Author ⟶ text ⟶ Reader ⟶ Performance ⟶ Audience

Meaning is imbedded in the text by the author; meaning is extracted from the text by the reader (student); meaning is transmitted by the reader into the performance; meaning is transmitted by the performance to the audience.[2] The student is a passive transmitter of the author's intent to a passive audience. The objectivist stance has the following implication. An author's intent is singular referent and,

therefore, only one interpretation-performance can be correct. A judge is asked to determine if a student's performance is "correct and true" to the author's intent.

Subjectivist

The subjectivist perspective is a direct opposite to objectivist/author's intent. A subjectivist position leaves interpretation of the text entirely in the hands of the receiver of the text, whether it be a reader or an audience. No boundaries exist to frame an interpretation. The following implications emerges from the subjectivist stance. First, *any* interpretation-performance enacted by a student is justified. A student has free reign to provide her interpretation of the text. Second, *any* response from the audience-judge is justified. The judge is responding to the performed text just as the student responded to the written text. Judges have, therefore, free reign to write *any* comments on the ballot they believe are pertinent to their interpretation.

Constructionist/Poststructural

Constructionist/poststructural is the final interpretive possibility open to a student. The constructionist perspective is based on negotiation between writers, performers, and audience members. Interpretation and performance of a text is neither predetermined nor completely open, but constrained by what persons bring to the interpretive moment (e.g., experiences, attitudes, values, purposes, societal standards, cultural norms). The text is not a passive conveyer of information to be retrieved, but point(s) of negotiation between all persons involved. As Chandler notes, "a text does not have a single unchanging meaning . . . . we may return to a text and make quite different meanings with it on each occasion" (pp. 1-2). I believe students using a constructionist perspective are making arguments with their

performances about how they interpret the text *and* what they wish to accomplish with the text. According to Chandler, "textual meanings can never be severed from interpretation . . . . Certainly the reader's purposes are at least as important as the author's intentions" (pp. 1-2). Implications: students carry the responsibility of carefully framing their interpretation and performance in order to generate the negotiated meaning they wish to convey; students must adapt to an audience as necessary to enhance the negotiation process.

Hierarchy Issues

I have a hierarchy I use with certain textual and interpretive choices:

1. I believe non-narrative poetry is more challenging than narrative poetry. All factors being equal, I will rank non-narrative poetry higher than narrative poetry.
2. I believe multi-character dramatic interpretations are more challenging than monologues. All factors being equal, I will rank multi-character performances a better rank.
3. I believe narrative prose is more challenging than first-person prose. All factors being equal, I will rank narrative prose higher.
4. I believe students may use their script books and script pages in any fashion they so desire (e.g., doors, steering wheels, cliff edges, weapons, transitions) contingent the use is enhancing and not distracting to the overall performance, and is appropriate to the chosen theoretical perspective.
5. I believe students may use blocking/movement in any fashion they so desire, contingent the use is enhancing and not distracting to the overall performance, and is appropriate to the chosen theoretical perspective.

PUBLIC ADDRESS EVENTS

Public address is an opportunity for students to engage in the exchange of concrete, sequential concepts. I believe public address events should adhere to traditional organizational and evidentiary requirements detailed in contemporary public speaking textbooks. I specifically believe certain events should strive to meet certain conditions. I detail the conditions below.

Impromptu Speaking

I believe impromptu speaking is an abbreviated form of persuasion. An impromptu speaker is attempting to influence how an audience understands a quotation (or cartoon or object). The focus of an impromptu-persuasion, dependent on the direction a speaker chooses, may be fact, value, or policy/action based. I believe, therefore, an impromptu speaker should provide claims/arguments as the foundation for the speech. A claims-based approach provides the student with the opportunity to take and defend a position about how they interpret the quotation. I believe a topics approach (e.g., "let's look to literature, history, and world events . . . ") is an inherently weaker form to persuade an audience to a position.

Extemporaneous Speaking

I believe extemporaneous speaking is an abbreviated form of persuasion designed to persuade an audience in a particular direction concerning current news issues. A speaker should take a definitive stance in answering the question and provide appropriate evidence to support the position. I am troubled by the use of "funky" sources in extemporaneous speaking. Credibility of the source is one

standard for judging the appropriateness of evidence. I can make a distinction between evidence from *USA Today* and *The Christian Science Monitor*. I am less likely to be able to make a credibility distinction between, for example, *The Bosnian Women's Journal* and *The Freedom Fighters' Report*. Speakers choosing to use sources less familiar to the audience should be prepared to include justification as to the appropriateness and credibility of the source.

After-Dinner Speaking

I believe after-dinner speaking is an informative or persuasive speech designed to make a point through the use of humor. An ADS should meet all the traditional standards for organization. I believe the humor in an ADS is stronger when the material flows from the subject matter, as opposed to being super-imposed onto the subject. I believe "blue" humor or bathroom humor quickly loses any effective impact. Any humor which is potentially degrading to religions, races, ethnicities, persons of color, cultures, and lifestyle choices (to name a few) should either be avoided or intrinsic to the subject matter.

Informative Speaking

I am open to a broad range of possibilities in an informative speech. I enjoy an informative speech which captures my attention and leaves the audience with a strong understanding of the subject matter. Informative speeches in competition tend to focus on either "the latest and greatest and previously unknown" disease or technology, or expand the scope of an item in our daily lives. I encourage students to stretch the boundaries of forensics and attempt informatives in other areas, such as

persons and places (which, ironically, are always mentioned in public speaking textbooks, but rarely seen in intercollegiate competition).

Persuasive Speaking

A persuasive speech should attempt to change or reinforce the beliefs, values, or actions of the audience members. Competitive speakers tend to focus on policy/action-oriented persuasions. I am open, however, to any distinct persuasive effort. I believe persuasive speakers should strive to include all forms of proof (logos, pathos, ethos) as appropriate to the subject matter and persuasive intent.

Rhetorical Criticism/Communication Analysis

I believe the distinction between rhetorical criticism and communication analysis is minute to the point of irrelevancy. Rhetoric encompasses any generation of meaning through the use of symbols. *All* communication is symbol-based, thus, all communication falls within the realm of rhetoric. I believe speakers should carefully frame what constitutes the artifact for analysis in a rhetorical criticism. I believe speakers should include artifactual evidence (e.g., textual quotations, images, symbols) as appropriate and necessary to support their analysis and implications. I believe speakers should draw implications from their analysis--not conclusions. Conclusions *end* a discussion. A rhetorical artifact is always open to re-interpretation and further discussion.

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Endnotes

[1] I refer the interested reader to *The Act of Writing* by Daniel Chandler and to *Critical Practice* by Catherine Belsey.

[2] Chandler (1995) refers to the objectivist process as "transmissive,: meaning is seen as something which can be transmitted from a sender to a passive receiver" (p. 1).